

MARTLEY – THE GEO VILLAGE CONCEPT

Introduction:

At the meeting at the Cob House on 5 October 2015, it was agreed that a draft paper would be put forward to re-introduce and clarify the Teme Valley Geological Society's proposals for an 'International Geo Village' concept marque.

Definition

A Geo-Village is a community that has distinctive geology within its bounds, has a policy of locally managed geological discovery and conservation, has developed a viable educational offer for both school pupils and adults and is using its geological assets in support of the local economy.

Ultimate Vision:

The ultimate objectives are to awaken communities in the EU to the value of their local geological assets and to create a network of accredited communities offering high quality geo-tourism facilities.

Accreditation would be against a set of agreed criteria (see below). An important feature would be to identify potential candidates and mentor them to full membership ("pathway to provision").

The network would be accessed via a GeoVillage portal to individual websites.

Further Details:

These follow on from the ultimate vision and objectives (focussed on the EU, given the principal funding streams that are potentially available there) and their appeal to geo tourists, walkers and other visitors, including targeting of various minority groups.

It is envisaged that these high quality *community* based localities (importantly smaller and apart from well-known national and international GeoParks and stand-alone sites and areas such as the Jurassic coast or Cheddar Gorge in the UK) will be spread across the whole of the EU. They will use their geological assets to discover and maximise the potential for geo-tourism bringing finances to less well known and perhaps more disadvantaged communities. Some communities may already be working along these lines but not yet within the concept of a geo-village network.

We imagine that applicant communities might generally have few if any other conflicting priorities. The concept will depend heavily on bringing together community groups to voluntarily support the project whilst taking advantage of funding streams that might be available from time to time.

Accreditation Criteria

These may include some or all of the following suggestions. Discussion is needed on this point to reach agreement.

- Active local volunteer support group to ensure that trails, sites and interpretations are sustained into the future
- key sites of geological interest (to be judged by professional team)
- easily accessible access to site locations
- trails and trail potential
- geo displays and information potential
- on-hand bookable guides (people)
- an undertaking from the community extending a welcome to geology visitors
- passing public transport
- service outlets in the form of shops, accommodation or refreshment provision
- local produce availability

A key part of the thought process is to develop the geological attraction as the initial attractor but to add to it other layers—local producers, craftworkers and so on and through increased exposure to develop these rural businesses and encourage others to start up.

While it is clear that, because of the desire to open up less developed sites in some of the newer EU member states, where the related visitor infrastructure may well be very basic, there should be a means whereby communities are able (and encouraged) to move forward on an agreed programme (with timescales) to meet these essential, desired or preferred criteria and achieve the accreditation set (mentoring). Certainly, they should offer good development potential rather than just remain, for example, the location of a small natural history museum or rock collection. The geological sites including museums should be signposted by means of several standardised symbols for the elderly, wheelchair access, visually impaired friendly etc. and certainly, as a minimum, be included within detailed related walking or cycling routes and trails promoted through leaflets or downloadable brochures. Websites would need to be in at least three languages to promote wider access of visitors.

It is hoped that a standardised format and accreditation could also be considered and possibly agreed through the further consideration of this draft paper through discussions with the founding partners of the Grundtvig project – in Eichstatt, Sentheim, Boyabat and other interested parties in, for example, Poland.

Portal

As stated above, the network could have a method of operating and a website similar in structure to that very successfully developed over recent years by the UK based 'Walkers are Welcome' initiative (www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk).

Actions

A priority might be to draw up a draft website frontpage. A properly costed and funded programme could then be developed. New geo village participants would need to be identified through an initial geographic regionalisation, such as i) Scandinavia ii) Mediterranean iii) Eastern iv) Central v) Iberia and vi) North-Western Europe (British Isles) as a way to establish a geographic transnational identity across the European dimension and a sample of say 5 new communities encouraged to participate. Contacts from the founding partners may prove a useful starting point although established EU routes or a targeted marketing programme may be appropriate. The key requirements would be to assess a community's geological assets, to identify sources of local advice and assistance that may be available and to identify individuals or groups that are keen to drive it through (in Turkey, for example, these were teachers). A minimum standard for accreditation could also be established. Inevitably, there will need to be a commitment of human and financial resources by communities and some measure of economic / tourism capacity and support from related local government and municipalities if the longer term objectives and detailed outcomes are to be secured in a coordinated approach and genuine partnership.

Experience at Martley

Based on our own experiences in Martley, the benefits of communities joining the scheme could include:

- Rural regeneration and employment potential – bringing additional visitors to the area spending money in local shops, pubs, B&Bs etc
- Encouraging community cohesion – combating rural isolation through social interaction, education across the ages, engaging and valuing older people in their experiences of quarrying, building from stone, changes to the village
- Health – through newly established or enhanced walking, cycling and horse riding trails
- Enhancing links with landowners – in Martley local landowners have offered access to geology sites and, in return, it would be appropriate to examine ways that we offer support

through promoting local produce like cheeses, butter, bread (from their own wheat), honey, fruit, chutney and preserves, beer, lamb, sausages, knitted items from home spun wool etc

- Enhancing links with local businesses – as we saw in Sentheim, where they worked with their local wineries on their geology day, to promote the use of locally produced items such as stone flooring, wine, cider (eg Bulmers in Herefordshire UK) and to examine sponsorship opportunities in this area
- Promoting biodiversity – in connection with the above, to preserve and encourage the planting of old fruit varieties like apples, pears and cherries and encourage and promote and show the wildlife that lives there and secure habitats for future generations
- Promoting traditional industries – in connection with the above, to use and secure old cider / perry pressing machinery and flour grinding equipment etc that still exists for the production of produce for sale. To carry out an audit of such machinery and methods for the community for heritage purposes. In Turkey, we saw the promotion of wood burning art with a geological emphasis.
- To promote the use of public transport to access the area badged as geo villages
- To examine and where possible establish wheelchair access to key geological sites and special trails based on the Martley experience. Based on Eichstatt's experience, to establish sensory trails for visually impaired visitors etc
- Educational benefits for all ages – including promoting geology based career opportunities
- To encourage social cohesion and awareness through organised educational visits by say inner city schools with sizeable ethnic minorities to see the geological assets and rural communities in action and, for example, to consider geology based careers.

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